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ABSTRACT

This teaching guide offers 13 suggestions for why biographies have such widespread use across curriculum areas. The guide then lists biographies in the areas of social studies, science, guidance programs, physical education, and the arts. The guide discusses the use of biography in developing reading, study, research, listening, speaking, writing, and art skills. Sixty-two references are attached. (MS)

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TEACHING WITH BIOGRAPHY

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Teaching with Biography

The stories of the lives of the great and near-great of history, as well as those of this generation, can be an effective resource in fulfilling specific objectives across curriculum areas.

Why are biographies so effective across the curriculum? What rationale can teachers and administrators offer to support a wide use of this genre of literature?

A "Baker's Dozen" of suggestions is offered.

Biographies and Autobiographies:

1. provide meaningful reading content about real people and the times in which they lived;
2. create transitional links between fanciful and realistic literature, or, between what is imagined and what is known;
3. extend experiential background by introducing persons and situations of other times and places;
4. add plausibility to understanding historical events through real people who witnessed the events;
5. foster a sense of history through the factual, realistic and

consistent truths of human existence, creating a "time-line" of growth and change and values to understand more clearly how people lived;

6. enrich appreciation of fine arts of music, painting and sculpture, and the performing arts of dance and drama through the lives of those who are the "persons" in the art form;

7. demonstrate lives of ethical values, courage and achievement, through knowing the people through their work and deeds;

8. suggest the role of the reader on the contemporary scene of current events through sharing the scenes and happenings with those who are intimately part of them;

9. motivate independent reading about real, interesting people, the real way they live and real events in their lives;

10. associate reading with gaining new ideas and information through "personal" contacts;

11. spark content areas: social studies, science, math, language arts, and music/art through witnessing and knowing men and women in each area through their individual roles;

12. help students to understand themselves through vicarious experience with others in identifying with their efforts and achievements;

13. develop an awareness of human relationships through "knowing" people of various cultures and talents in their actual life setting

Is it a "Magic Carpet" or a "Mural"? It's a *calendar!*

The initial step in the classroom is the preparation of a comprehensive calendar for the school year to include birthdates of distinctive individuals who in some way can be related to the grade level curriculum and student interests. Student birthdays add a personal link to the monthly entrees. Additions to the calendar can be made by the students as they become aware of birthdays of famous people through their reading and learning experiences. [Suggestions include O.Henry, 9/11/62; Arthur Miller, 10/17/15; Mark Twain, 11/30/1835; Willa Cather, 12/7/1873; Isaac Asimov, 1/2/20; Charles Dickens, 2/7/1812; Robert Frost, 3/26/1874; Washington Irving, 4/3/1783; Walt Whitman, 5/31/1819; Nikki Giovanni, 6/7/43; Ernest Hemingway, 7/21/1899; Ray Bradbury, 8/22/20.]

Biographies of the same person, written at varying reading levels, provide two benefits: [1] sharing the same classroom discussion and preparation with the entire class, and [2] individualizing reading material to meet

student reading needs.

The librarian [school/ district/ community] is invited to assume a participating role in this project for guidance with specific resources such as collective biographies for teacher reference, and instructional aids of films and recordings for classroom enrichment.

Direct communication with the various agencies representing foreign countries, as well as the United States Government Information Bureaus and Superintendent of Documents can provide literature, reading lists and illustrations of birthplaces and landmarks.

A Sampling of Subjects: Links in a Continuing Theme or Pattern

Suggestions for Teaching

In Social Studies: Read about...

1. Explorers: Balboa [52]; Champlain [53]; Columbus [23; 54]; Henry Hudson [55]; Magellan [56];
2. Frontier Life: Daniel Boone [6; 16]; Kit Carson [3];
3. Transportation and Communication... Thomas A. Edison [43]; Robert Fulton [31]; Charles A. Lindberg [12];

4. American and World History... Presidents of the United States: Lincoln [8; 30; 47]; Truman [10]; Washington [7]; Kennedy [26]; Reagan [2]; Robert E. Lee [11];

5. Contemporary Leaders and Events...Cesar Chavez [20]; Anne Frank [21]; Martin Luther King Jr. [14]; Winnie Mandela [40]; Thurgood Marshall [62]; Christa McAuliffe [4]; Sandra Day O'Connor [27]; Mother Teresa [35];

In Science: Read about...Benjamin Banneker [44]; George Washington Carver [1]; Jacques Cousteau [61]; Marie Curie [59]; Albert Einstein [29]; Benjamin Franklin [22]; Galileo [9]; Florence R. Sabin [17];

In the Guidance Program: Read about "Role Models" whose lives demonstrate human values and qualities, outstanding achievements, and self-development to the fullest extent possible...

Persons whose lives demonstrate such qualities as concern for others, initiative, perseverance, integrity and willingness to work to achieve success in a chosen vocation or profession: Jane Addams [39]; Clara Barton [5]; Florence Nightingale [42]; Annie Sullivan [50]; Mother Teresa [35];

...especially those who have overcome handicapping conditions: Laura Bridgman [28]; Karen [32; 33]; Helen Keller [25]; Thomas Gallaudet[41];

Tom Sullivan [66];

In Physical Education: Read about: Roy Campanella [63]; Wilt Chamberlain [61]; Ty Cobb [45]; Mary Lou Retton [60]; Jackie Robinson [13];

In the Arts: Read about contributors to American and World Culture...

Dance: Martha Graham [57]; Margot Fonteyn [49]; Arthur Mitchell [58];

Music: Leonard Bernstein [19]; George Gershwin [18];

Literature: Charles Dickens [34]; Louisa May Olcott [36; 38]; Mark Twain [37];

Art: Vincent Van Gogh [20].

There are specific skills in the *Language Arts* areas which may be applied to reading biographical literature in the instructional program.

In developing reading and study skills.. [1] identify essential information; [2] read maps, charts, graphs; [3] read for directions in construction and procedures for projects related to reading; [4] read orally selected portions or episodes or dialogues; [5] interpret pictures and illustrations; [6] read critically varying editions on the same subject to establish

authenticity; [7] read several editions, as available, to compare and contrast viewpoints of subject and/or writer, i.e. Christopher Columbus (How does each author describe the discovery of America?)

In using research skills.. [1] locate books in the library; [2] locate information in the encyclopedia; [3] skim for facts; [4] use an index; [5] paraphrase information; [6] summarize information; [7] construct a time-line or other schema to place people and events in perspective.

In listening... [1] to oral reports; [2] to recordings; [3] to selected and varied readings.

In speaking.. [1] present oral reports; [2] dramatize episodes in lives of famous persons, "You are there..." [3] role-play a discussion as a person met through reading a biography; [4] use improvisation or pantomime to dramatize episodes in a biography; [5] prepare a panel discussion on issues or incidents in which famous people were involved, i.e Anne Frank, Martin Luther King Jr.; [6] discuss various editions of a person's biography; [7] pattern "quiz" or "talk shows following familiar TV formats with "famous" participants met through reading.

In writing... [1] keep a diary or journal or log of a famous person, "as if..."; [2] create an imaginary dialogue between two individuals in history or the arts; [3] write a fanciful adventure of an explorer; [4] write original poems related to events in a person's life; [5] report a personal interview with a famous or distinctive individual, integrating reading (preparation), speaking (interview), writing (follow-up report); [6] create a "pen pal" activity with famous people as correspondents; [7] design a class historical newspaper edition with timely headlines and feature articles; [8] create a crossword puzzle using selected subject words associated with reading; [8] write an original biography or autobiography.

In Art... [1] design original book jackets; [2] create advertising posters; [3] prepare a mural or montage as a group project to depict an event or period; [4] interpret an event through a diorama; [5] plan time-lines to illustrate time spans and to demonstrate differences in life styles and needs.

A Concluding Note...

In summary, I refer to the seven categories of biography and autobiography identified by Carlsen in *Books and the Teenage Reader* [Harper&Row, 1980], which invite a fair "sampling" in our teaching with biography: [1] fictionalized (consistent with the character and historical period); [2]

definite (based on known facts); [3] interpretive (draws a "portrait"); [4] objective (chronological order, factual, documented); [5] biographical monuments and antimonuments (minimize faults *or* destroy rather than build); [6] critical biography (assesses a person's contributions to society); [7] biographical collections (short accounts of lives or descriptions of particular events in their lives that tie the collection together) i.e *They Wouldn't Quit: Stories of Handicapped People* by Ravina Gelfand. [24]

The "Biography Boon" to reading and learning can begin with one classroom. Don't be surprised if an entire grade or school becomes part of a "Biography Bonanza"!

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